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FIRM MANAGEMENT

Your Firm and Your Cloud

You must be thoughtful about your strategy and tactics, carefully choosing your technology stack and where you spend your time.

Randy Johnston • Sep. 26, 2022



Cloud, cloud, cloud. That term seems to be the buzzword of the profession. But what does it mean to be “Your Cloud?” What works for you and your firm? I intend to talk about how cloud and mobile technology evolved, and the strategic benefit cloud methodology can bring to you, your firm, and your clients.

While you will see the theme and special report of this issue is data security and cybersecurity, you should refer to my last column to learn about security risks and to

get your cybersecurity right. I want to focus on Web-Based cloud and mobile technologies that can help you build a cloud-first strategy. What am I learning “from the trenches” in my daily work with CPA firms, accounting VARs, and software publishers, and how can you leverage my experience?

What are Web-Based cloud and mobile technologies you can use?

Cloud technology means many different things. In the early evolution of the cloud, I tended to be more of a technology purist. Centralizing data and running applications in a browser met my definition best as I assisted in designing accounting software tools such as [Accounting Power](#), [Acumatica](#), [NetSuite](#), [QuickBooks Online](#), [Sage Intacct](#), [Xero](#), [Zoho](#), and more. This cloud computing style became known as Software as a Service or SaaS.

However, limitations of internet speed, centralized computing power, and browser features made many of these early SaaS products seem pretty clunky. But the elegance of centralized updates to the software that could occur rapidly, leveraging the data to do more intelligent things, such as classification & coding, and having an automatic backup was beneficial. Clearly, this baby was evolving into a juvenile and had the promise of being an attractive and helpful adult.

Now, 25 years later, SaaS accounting software is maturing and becoming more valuable and convenient. Is it perfect yet? No. But how many people in their twenties are entirely mature and capable? Not many. Marc Benioff, [founder of Salesforce with three others](#), with the mission statement of “The End of Software,” referring to the distribution of software on CD-ROM. Salesforce claims to be the [first company to offer SaaS](#), renting software over the internet rather than installing programs on machines. SaaS is pure Web-Based software and should be part of your strategy.

Likewise, mobile technology means many different things. In the early evolution of the mobile, I tended to be more of an anywhere, anytime, any device (AAA) thinker. While I had run remote computing on mainframes in the 1970s and remote access over Wide Area Networks (WANs) for banks in the 1980s, this AAA approach became effective when I started using [Citrix Multiuser](#) on OS/2 in 1991 before the company’s evolution into Windows with my [NMGI](#) team.

I wanted to be able to run a computer or terminal from anywhere. I was less cell phone-centric even though I [evolved with cell phones](#) by starting with a car phone in my trunk in the 1980s and using cell phones to connect to computers as soon as the technology was available. I changed to mobile phones with the [DynaTAC 8000X](#),

Motorola [2900 bag phone](#), Motorola [MicroTAC](#) flip phone, Motorola [StarTAC](#), and a parade of other cell phones, giving my [K2 Enterprises](#) team something new to discuss every year at events.

Cell phones and mobile technology continued to evolve through [NTT DoCoMo's i-mode platform](#), [BlackBerry](#), Nokia's [Symbian](#) platform, and [Windows Mobile](#). Personal digital assistants like the [PalmPilot](#), [Apple Newton](#), and others served their purpose until the arrival of the [smartphone](#), which combined mobile telephone and computing functions into one unit. A popular smartphone, the [iPhone](#), arrived in 2007. Touch screens, applications ([There's an app for that](#)), and the evolution of tablets like the [iPad](#), [Kindle](#) (now [Amazon Fire](#)), [Samsung Galaxy](#), and other [tablets](#) allowed these mobile devices to become small, powerful, convenient computers.

Today, you and your clients expect the convenience of using your smartphone to access any information you care to look up in seconds. Why shouldn't business be transacted conveniently? Mobile technology is the freedom to run the technology you want securely and conveniently on any device, anywhere, at any time of day, and should be part of your strategy.

What cloud strategies can you use?

The list of cloud technologies enables many cloud strategies. What is needed for your practice, your clients, and your life? What is your [strategy](#) as you position your tax, audit, CAS (Client Accounting Services), Advisory, Wealth Management, or any variety of vertical niche offerings? Is it cloud first? Is it about relationships? Integrity, Independence, Client Service, Team Member Experience, Profitability, and more can be in your strategic plan. And what are your tactics? Convenience, Client Experience, automation, recurring revenue, and more can be in your tactical plan.

While [The Technology Lab Podcast](#) can give you a tactical view of product solutions, co-host [Brian Tankersley](#) and I have many strategic discussions and thoughtfully advance individual solutions for your [technology stack](#). Have you thought about your practice's [future](#) and what [emerging technologies](#) will bring? As mentioned in previous columns, Brian and I are rebuilding our technology stack recommendations across all practice areas.

You'll see more from us on this in the future as we remain independent recommenders and advisors, with a concern for vendor and monetary bias in many stack recommendations. I'm particularly excited about my new designs for the

business and accounting use of the Metaverse extending the thinking of [Matthew Ball](#) into our specialty.

Let's get to the core cloud offerings that I recommend that you consider, choose and use

1. **SaaS software** when it works for your firm and clients with tools like [Accounting Power](#), [AccountingSuite](#), [Acumatica](#), [NetSuite](#), [QuickBooks Online](#), [Sage Intacct](#), [Spire Systems](#), [Xero](#), or [Zoho](#)
2. **Collaborative tools** with your clients, with tools like [BizEKG](#) from [4ImpactData](#), [e-Courier](#), [Liscio](#), [PATH](#) by [Simplex Financials](#), or [Suralink](#)
3. **Accounting automation** whenever possible with tools like [Dext](#), [Hubdoc](#), or [Sage Autoentry](#)
4. **Productivity Suites** with [Google Workspace](#), [Microsoft 365](#) (particularly E5 for CPA firms), or [Zoho One](#)
5. **A modern, continuously updated website** with a [.CPA domain name](#) as well as video and social media feeds
6. **Easy payment methods** with services from [Corpay One](#), [CPACharge](#), or [QuickFee](#)
7. **Outsource for additional labor** with services from [AdvanceTrack](#), [BooXkeeping](#), [TOA Global](#), [Taxfyle](#) or [Xpitax](#)
8. **Hosting or private cloud** deployments for legacy applications such as practice management, tax, audit, TValue, and QuickBooks desktop with suppliers like [Ace Cloud Hosting](#), [CETROM](#), [Right Networks](#), or [Network Management Group, Inc.](#)
9. **Practice tools for your firm evolving to the cloud** with [choices](#) such as [Avii](#), [Canopy](#), [Clarity Practice Management](#), [Corvee](#), [Doc-It Suite Cloud](#), [DoMore](#), [Karbon](#), [SmartVault](#), [Tallyfor](#), [Thomson Reuters ONVIO](#), [TPS Cloud Axis](#), [Verdocs](#), [weintegrate](#), or [Wolters Kluwer CCH Axxess](#)
0. **Emerging technologies with your clients** with [choices](#) such as [Gilded](#), [Ledgible](#) by [Verady](#), [LukkaTax](#), and [Vic.AI](#)

So, What Do I Do Now?

As you can see, Web-Based cloud and mobile technology opportunities abound. These tools can give you a competitive edge, particularly if you are a smaller firm. You can use most of the same technologies your competitors buy and leverage. You must be thoughtful about your strategy and tactics, carefully choosing your technology stack and where you spend your time. You can get leverage through more automation, outsourcing, and connecting cloud-based tools.

I have recommended ways to create your own strategic and tactical plans in various previous columns. It is time to review and update those plans. Your action plan and day-to-day activities must also evolve or quickly become obsolete. Finally, addressing cloud opportunities is not a project; instead, it is a process. If you need continuing guidance, watch this space.

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